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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000345

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [CASC](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES MINISTER OF STATE OF INTERIOR
FOR LENIENCY IN CASE OF 31 AMERICAN CITIZENS ORDERED
DEPORTED

REF: DOHA 333

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Ambassador LeBaron pressed Minister of State for Interior Affairs Abdullah Nasser Al Thani to proceed leniently when acting on the deportation of 31 Americans (9 families in all) apparently for proselytizing.

-- Al Thani, only partially briefed on the case, told the Ambassador that he did not know all the details but would look into these cases and schedule another meeting to report his findings. (Now scheduled for Thursday.)

-- Al Thani did indicate that the deportation orders were related to proselytizing at work camps in Doha's Industrial Area, particularly in the Pakistani Muslim community.

-- Several American citizens ordered deported contacted the Embassy to report the deportation orders have been rescinded. However, the Embassy is seeking confirmation from the Ministry of Interior.

(C) COMMENTS

-- Al Thani was keen to emphasize the Government of Qatar's message of openness to other religions and its predilection to tolerance and dialogue.

-- The Articles of Qatar's Penal Code are not clear about what constitutes "proselytizing." The Articles, if interpreted broadly, could hold penalties for those who have knowledge of any one involved in proselytizing.

-- Americans facing deportation maintain that they have not proselytized; they have not even visited the labor camps in question, although they add that they know of others who have been to the camps.

End Key Points and Comments.

1. (C) Ambassador LeBaron and Consular Section Chief Timothy Ponce called May 25th on Minister of State for Interior Affairs Abdullah Khalid Al Thani at his office at the Ministry of Interior (MOI).

2. (C) Referring to his notes, Al Thani stated that some of the U.S. citizens were ordered deported because they went to work camps in Doha's Industrial Area. This was a particular problem in the Pakistani work camps, for two reasons. First, the Pakistani workers are Muslim. Second, many of the workers are illegal aliens and over 1,000 workers live there.

The area can be dangerous for non-Pakistanis, and the police go in force to these areas when there is a problem. If a religious group is going to this area, they should coordinate with MOI to review their activities and for their security. This religious group had not.

13. (C) Al Thani stressed repeatedly to the Ambassador that the Government of Qatar (GOQ) respects all religions, pointing to the development of the church community in Mesaimeer. The MOI provides security for that church community and has provided anything the registered churches there have requested. In fact, 58 churches operate in Qatar, holding services in flats, villas, and at facilities at the church community. These groups are protected by Qatari law so long as these churches restrict their activities to their private facilities and within the church community.

14. (C) Despite Qatar's openness, continued Al Thani, other religions sometimes find themselves in conflict with the local community, such as when many vehicles park in neighborhood communities for their services and block the roads. The MOI works with the communities and the religious groups to mediate the differences. MOI officers meet with the various religious groups to help and ensure that all religions and groups maintain a good relationship within the surrounding community.

15. (C) In response, Ambassador LeBaron urged Al Thani to exercise leniency. The American citizens did not understand what they had done wrong. They had not been warned about any wrongdoing. They had yet been given a reason for their deportations. The 31 ordered deported included children who

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almost certainly had no part in these activities.

16. (C) At the same time, Ambassador noted that American citizens are guests in Qatar. The U.S. Embassy works, and will continue to work, to make sure the American citizen community in Qatar understands Qatar's laws, culture and traditions, and respects them.

17. (C) The Ambassador also voiced his concern about the damage that might occur to Qatar's reputation, unless these deportation orders were more clearly justified. People in the United States and elsewhere could have a difficult time understanding the reasoning behind these deportation orders. The New York Times already had called about the deportations. It had indicated it might send reporters to Qatar to investigate.

18. (C) Al Thani noted that he will meet with MFA Assistant Minister of Follow-Up Affairs Mohamad Al-Rumaihi on Tuesday, May 26, to further discuss the matter.

19. (C) Al Thani noted that the MOI has many ways to handle the problem. Referring to Qatar's Penal Code, the relevant portions of which -- Articles 257 through 265 -- Al Thani provided to Ambassador, Al Thani said taking the cases to court would be difficult for the foreign citizens involved. Because the GOQ respects other religions, he would prefer to offer deportation, which is a better solution to the problem for the foreign citizens.

110. (C) Note: Articles 257 through 265 refer to punishments for any offense that might injure Islam or preach against it.

The copy Al Thani provided had highlighted the following English language translation of section of Article 257: "shall be punished by imprisonment any person who established, formed, organized, or managed a society, body organization or branch of the same with the objective of combating or injuring the basis or principle of Islamic religion or what came to be known of it by necessity, or preached for other than this religion, or preached for a faith or view implying something of the aforementioned, or encouraged or promoted the same."

¶11. (C) (Comment: Clearly, this is a substandard translation from the Arabic, and Embassy will seek a better translation.)

¶12. (C) Articles 258 through 265 are of a similar nature and include punishments including fines and prison sentences up to five years.

¶13. (C) Al Thani reiterated that Christians and other religions are free to pray, worship and do as they please in their facilities. The Government of Qatar welcomes all religions and nationalities. The GOQ will maintain its open stance to other religions, including opening a new church complex for the Mormon fellowship in Doha.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

¶14. (SBU) Since reftel, Con Chief received several phone calls from the American citizens involved. They indicated that they had been called by the same MOI officer and informed that the deportation orders had been revoked. However, they mentioned that the deportation order for a South African Pilot of Qatar Airways still stands.

¶15. (SBU) Con Chief also asked one of the American citizens after the Ambassador's meeting with Al Thani if she or any of the American citizens ordered deported were aware of or involved in Christian outreach to the Industrial Area. She stated that she knew of these activities, but no one in the current group had participated or was otherwise involved. Con Chief has organized a meeting tomorrow at the Embassy to discuss the deportation orders further.

LeBaron